L223

E 642
L223
Copy 1

MEMORIAL DAY ORATION

OF

WILLIAM H. LAMBERT

ARLINGTON VA.

1883

With Compliments of

WILLIAM H. LAMBERT,

Brevet Major U.S.V.

MUTUAL LIFE BUILDING,
Philadelphia.

MEMORIAL DAY

ORATION

OF

WILLIAM H. LAMBERT

AT THE

NATIONAL CEMETERY

ARLINGTON VA.

May 30 1883

PHILADELPHIA
1883

ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIVE COPIES PRINTED

FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

GRANT, FAIRES & RODGERS,
PRINTERS,
52 & 54 NORTH SIXTH STREET,
PHILADELPHIA.

ORATION.

To COMMEMORATE the great deliverance which the LORD wrought for His chosen people, He ordained a ceremonial to be observed by all their generations forever.

Lest the memorial should deteriorate into a meaningless form, He commanded the father to shew the son, saying, "This is done because of that which the LORD did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt."

We are to-day assembled to commemorate our Nation's dead, and though neither antiquity nor divine command hallows our ceremonial, surely when our sons ask, "What mean ye by this service?" we may say, this is done because the strong hand of the LORD wrought for our people a mighty deliverance.

The consequences of the War of the Rebellion so far exceeded the purposes and the hopes which we cherished at its outbreak, that in these later years we are disposed to consider its results as the object for which the war was undertaken.

The remote causes of the war were doubtless beyond the control of the generation which witnessed the strife. Whatever these remote causes may have been, whether the diverse climatic influences prevalent in the North and the South, or the opposing characteristics of the early settlers of the two sections, or the antagonistic views relative to the rights of the States, or more directly the conflicting systems of free and slave labor, the occasion of the war was the election of Abraham Lincoln to the Presidency, and the immediate cause was the determination of our people, irrespective of party, to maintain the union of the States.

The election of a President by a party whose main principle was opposition to the encroachment of slavery, and whose success indicated the lessening of the over-mastering influence which had hitherto been exerted by the slaveholding States, was rendered possible by the increasing antagonism to slavery itself. But whilst that party was united in that all its members were opposed to slavery and were agreed in resistance to the extension of that institution into new territory, they differed widely in their opinions concerning other methods of preventing its growth. There were those in the Republican party who favored warring upon slavery, regardless of con-

stitutional restriction, but the vast majority of its members, whilst believing slavery to be a great evil whose suppression was eminently desirable, recognized the provisions which forbade any interference with it within the limits of States already existent, and hoped for nothing more than the prevention of its spread into States yet to be formed.

Believing freedom to be national and slavery sectional, the Republican party had yet neither desire nor intention to violate, in the slightest degree, the rights of the slaveholding States.

Innocent of all purpose to infringe the rights, whether inherent or constitutional, of any of the States, the people of the North were loath to believe that a political victory won in strict accord with the Constitution and laws of the land, was to form a pretext to justify withdrawal from the Union, and were slow to realize that the Nation was on the verge either of dissolution or of civil war.

As doubt resolved into fear and fear strengthened into certainty, as the terrible reality was apprehended, the anxiety of the North to prevent the threatened calamity was manifested by proposals bordering upon humiliation. So earnest was our purpose to avoid strife that we were willing to yield anything, save the fundamental principles which had triumphed in the recent elec-

tion. Propositions of the most liberal character, declarations to maintain the Constitution inviolate, guarantees that there should be no interference with slavery within the States, were alike rejected by the South as insufficient, and it was evident that naught save our abject submission would satisfy the imperious demands of the leaders who had determined upon the disruption of the Union.

'Mid blackness of darkness the Nation was drifting to war or to death.

When the shock could no longer be averted, and the impending storm burst upon the land, the call to arms was not an elaborate argument upon the unconstitutionality of secession, not a philosophical disquisition concerning State rights, not even an indignant denunciation of slavery, but an appeal to stand by the flag.

Many of us believed that Northern extremists were alike blamable with those of the South for the fearful peril which threatened the land; many of us hoped against hope for a peaceful solution of our difficulties; we differed greatly respecting the policy to be pursued towards the disloyal States; but the shot on Sumter declared speculation as to the measure of responsibility to be useless, proved the futility of our hopes of peace, banished political differences, and made ready a people to answer the Government's call.

We staid not for questions, we waited not to consider the consequences of war, the authority of the Nation had been defied, its flag had been insulted, and to uphold the honor of that flag, to enforce the authority of the Nation, was an all-sufficient purpose, and for that we entered the war.

The long years of the war were crowded with stirring events. Our faces were oft illumined by the glow of victory, our hearts often beat fast in the assurance of ultimate triumph, hope never failed us even in the darkest hours, often, indeed, we trod the valley of humiliation, but always to emerge upon heights of promise; but not the proudest and most joyous memories of the war can overshadow the enthusiasm, the gladness, and the pride of the early days that witnessed the great uprising.

Our people sprang to arms, not for conquest, not to subvert the Constitution, not to propagate the principles of party, not to accomplish moral reform, not to abolish slavery—that curse of the land, that disgrace of the century—but to preserve the Republic.

Doubtless there were many in our ranks who knew that to assert National authority was to cripple slavery, many who entered the service as upon a crusade for freedom whose final issue

must be the abolition of slavery, many who desired the war to cease only when that result had been attained, but the purpose which animated our armies and which had called them into being was the maintenance of "the Union and the Constitution, and the Enforcement of the Laws."

Had the political organization whose principles were enunciated in these words succeeded in the recent election, it could not have adhered more closely to these principles than did the new administration.

To save the Union was the single purpose of the people, the controlling policy of the Government.

But in the providence of God, another issue than the simple maintenance of the Union was projected into the war, and slavery, because identified with treason, its principle and its stay, was doomed to stand or fall as our arms were defeated or victorious.

What statesmen had prophesied, what ourselves had surmised, we learned in the hard school of war, — the perpetuity of the Union could be secured only through freedom to the slave.

Honest doubts and misgivings prompted some of our number to turn back, but the great host in arms to preserve the Nation felt that the cause was not less worthy because freedom was involved in the victory.

The war ended with every purpose for which it was waged accomplished, no organized opposition to the Government existed on the face of the continent, the flag waved in triumph over every State of the Union, and four millions of slaves were freed men.

All that the army had undertaken it had done, its work was finished, and the exultant legions were summoned to the Capital only that in grand review they might signalize the victory ere they passed into history. None feared that the troops who in war had maintained the national authority would, in the pride of their power, usurp that authority in peace. Our citizen soldiers, without thought of other purpose, and simply as matter of course, returned to the homes whence they came.

History again repeated itself, and as peacefully as the army of the Revolution had disbanded when its work was done, so melted away the mightier army which had crushed the Rebellion.

Important events have often sprung from apparently insignificant causes, great historic changes have often had seemingly inadequate origin, but the means through which these momentous results were achieved were commensurate. Our freedom was bought with an adequate price. How stupendous were the means employed, the graves

which are decorated to-day throughout the land, by their very numbers attest, but how tremendous was the cost, these graves can only suggest.

So inestimable a victory demanded an infinite sacrifice.

The triumph was not alone for our country or for our generation, but for all lands and for all time. The struggle was not merely to determine the existence of this "Nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men were created equal," but whether "any nation so conceived and dedicated" could "long endure." In this Nation the experiment of self-government had been tried under exceptionally favorable conditions, had it failed, "government by the people" might well have perished from the earth.

The task which the close of the war imposed upon the Government was of extraordinary difficulty, and was made all the harder because the great President had been stricken to death, and the administration devolved upon one whose misfortune it was to excite the distrust of the majority of the people who had sustained the war, and to become involved in angry controversy with a co-ordinate branch of the Government.

Complete as were the achievements of our arms, the opinions of the defeated people were not changed,—no war ever has accomplished such

result. Nor was it to be expected that men who had upheld their cause so bravely and at such immense cost as did they, would acknowledge themselves in error because they had been defeated. Assuredly we should not have doubted the righteousness of our cause even though it had ended in disaster.

Remembering that during the trying years of the reconstruction—years when of all others, harmony of purpose was essential to the welfare of the Nation—the President and Congress differed radically in their plans for restoring the lately rebellious States to their normal position in the Union, and that this difference exerted a baleful influence throughout the South and encouraged the leaders of the Rebellion to hope that through diversity of opinion in the North they might to some degree change, if not indeed reverse, some of the issues of the war; remembering that the men charged with authority in the South, representatives of the Government so lately an enemy, were not always competent to the discharge of their delicate trust; it is not astonishing that outrage and wrong characterized the transitional period which followed the war.

Remembering also that the war had resulted not only in the defeat of the armies of the insurgents, but in the utter destruction of the institu-

tion for whose protection they had undertaken the war, and that it had revolutionized the social system of the South, it is not surprising that the process of accommodation to the changed circumstances was slow. Evils, the growth of centuries, are not easily uprooted, inborn prejudices are not easily overcome, it is, therefore, not wonderful that the Southern people have been slow to adapt themselves to the radical changes which followed their defeat. Nor is it strange that the master frets and chafes under an order of society in which his former slave is politically his peer.

The wounds inflicted by a contest of such magnitude and bitterness were naturally slow to heal.

But Time, supplementing the war, has also wrought great change, and though lawlessness and wrong may not yet have entirely ceased, though the weak may not yet be wholly freed from oppression, the Southern States secure in the possession of their constitutional rights, sharing the prosperity of the country they strove to destroy, are at peace, and the greater part of their citizens honestly acquiescent in the result of war.

Though during the war, despite many discouragements, we never lost faith in our ability to defeat the Confederate armies and to enforce obedience to law, we yet feared that to maintain the national authority in the South would

require the constant presence of the national armies. And as if to confirm our fears the rebel leaders persistently declared that though we might overrun and desolate their territory, we could never restore the seceding States to their former relation. Whilst citizens of foreign lands, either sympathizing with the Confederacy, or calmly indifferent to the issue of the great contest, assumed the dissolution of the Federal Union to have been already consummated, asserting that a voluntary compact once broken could not be restored by force of arms.

We have lived to behold the groundlessness of our fear, the practical retraction of rebel declaration, and the gratuitousness of foreign assumption. For whatever of excuse there may have been for the fear, however honest and sincere the declaration, however theoretically correct the assumption, the facts disprove them all. To-day, twenty-seven thousand men constitute the army of the United States; of these, five hundred garrison the forts and arsenals of the South, to repossess which the Government had called into service two millions of men.

The Federal Union was indeed maintained by force of arms, but it exists to-day, not upheld by the bayonets of an army, but by the will of a united people.

The stability of our governmental system had not only been tried in battle, but in peace was to be subjected to tests scarcely less severe than those of war. Battle ordeal and peaceful test alike proved the staying powers of the Republic.

The ship of State had not weathered the terrible storm only to founder in smoother waters 'neath lesser gales.

The Nation which had so successfully endured the great war was to withstand the reaction which followed cessation of hostilities, when party ties which had weakened and sundered under stress of the common peril, renewed their strength; when the people who had united against a common foe, separated upon questions of policy whereon opinions might differ without disloyalty to the Government; and when party fealty resumed its sway and political strife regained the importance of which it had been so long deprived by war.

At the height of political contention, and by reason of it, the Nation was brought to face an emergency of such character that in any land and at any time it would have excited the gravest apprehensions, but which was indeed appalling in our land, so recently come forth from a terrible civil war, and with a legislature whose membership included many who in that war had been arrayed against the Nation. Well might thoughtful men

tremble for the safety of a Government so tried and tested. But to the honor of our people the momentous question was submitted to arbitrators chosen from among our own countrymen, and their decision was obeyed, though at least a moiety of our citizens believed it unjust. And the President whose election was questioned, was held to have a perfect title because it was awarded him by a lawfully appointed tribunal, and he was obeyed as loyally, North and South, as though he had entered his high office upborne by an undoubted popular majority.

And when for the second time in our history and in our own generation, an assassin struck down the Chief Magistrate, a condition of affairs existed, fraught with possibilities more dangerous than occurrences which had overturned more than one European government.

The anxieties and sorrows of those months when a Nation was waiting and watching by the bedside of the illustrious sufferer are yet vivid in our memories. Among the watchers by the bedside, among the mourners at the grave of the President, were the people of the States so lately in rebellion.

And we should thank God that the loyalty and common sense of the whole people stayed and upheld the Government during those months when

there was raised a gravely important question of administration for whose solution no precedent existed, and when by an unparalleled combination of events but one life intervened between order and technical anarchy.

The ground on which we now stand, over which the flag of the United States floats, not merely in recognition of this day and in respect to these dead, but in token of ownership by the Government, is held to-day by title different from that of one year ago. By the decree of our highest civil tribunal* a title which we had believed to be absolute, because created by war and confirmed by victory and vested in a Sovereignty incapable of being sued in its own courts, except by its own consent, has been invalidated, and conceding the authority of the decree, the Government has perfected its ownership by purchase.

It would ill become your speaker, nay it would be height of presumption, to gainsay a decision rendered by so august a tribunal as the Supreme Court of the United States. Nor would he, even were this the fitting place and occasion, question the righteousness of the judgment that this property had been wrongfully exposed for sale,

* United States vs. Lee, 1 Sup. Ct. Reporter 240. Miller, J., delivering the opinion of the Court, and Waite, C. J., and Bradley, Woods and Gray, J. J., dissenting.

but waiving consideration of the manner in which it came into possession of the Government, it is difficult for the non-legal mind to comprehend the nicety of the reasoning by which a suit that could not lie against the sovereign Nation, could lie against the Nation's officers who in obedience to its commands held the property for its sole and direct use, as the resting place of the dead who fell in the conflict which determined the existence and the Sovereignty of the Nation.

I refer to this change in the title, simply because it furnishes another evidence of the reign of law in the land so lately torn by gigantic civil strife. That, for even a moment, the title to Arlington could revert to one who himself sought to destroy the Government, and is son of him to whom, more than to any other, the Confederacy owed its prolongation, was an idea so repugnant to our sense of fitness and justice, as to be impossible of toleration; but that the title did so pass and that there was no outbreak of indignant protest throughout the country is additional proof of our respect for law and for the rights, even of those whom we once thought had forfeited all right to life and property.

Perhaps, however, it was not alone respect for law that allowed the title to this cemetery to revert to its original owner, without active oppo-

sition, but, as well, the consciousness of our people that the passage of title was merely upon paper, that there was no danger that the plough would "turn its furrow" here, that no writ would run against the occupants of these graves, and that no administration could waive because of any cost the Nation's right of eminent domain.

We rejoice that we are here to-day by no man's sufferance, that the Government holds this property by a title which none can question, and that no dispute can again disturb these dead.

May their rest remain unbroken until the hour cometh when "the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God." May He grant that when that voice sounds, they that sleep in these graves shall hear and live.

Surely, the Union is real—the States are indeed United—which can suppress a rebellion, the most formidable in history; which, upon the close of that rebellion, and again within half a generation thereafter, can endure without shock, other than that of intensest grief, a transfer of administration enforced by assassination; which can peacefully determine a disputed succession to the Chief Magistracy; which can abide the decision of civil tribunals in controversies resulting from the war, even when those decisions are adverse to the sentiment for which men died, and that triumphed

in that war; which can admit to the national legislature and to active participation in affairs of state, men who but a few years ago were in armed array against the Government; and which maintained in war by the courage and devotion of its citizens, in peace rests upon their patriotic obedience to law.

"Such is the Nation on behalf of which these citizens, resolved that it should not be wrested from them, have nobly fought and died." They need no higher eulogy.

The war being over, the new order of things being accepted, peace prevailing throughout the land, why cherish the memories of the terrible strife? why continue an observance which recalls the scenes of those eventful years?

The passions and bitterness of the war-time are indeed past, and we are not gathered to awaken those bitter memories, or to rekindle those vengeful passions, or over these graves to swear eternal hate to our former enemies, but only to strew flowers—emblems of peace and love—over the resting place of our dead.

We do not recount their deeds that we may exult over their defeated adversaries, but only that we may justly appreciate the devotion to which these graves bear witness.

Israel was bidden to commemorate the great deliverance, not that the Egyptian should be hated, but that the LORD should be remembered.

Themselves the heirs of all the ages our brothers were inspired by the glories of the past to noble emulation, and their deeds shall enhance the heritage of the ages to come.

Justice to the dead and duty to posterity alike demand that we transmit the glorious story untarnished and undimmed.

In the hour of its greatest peril these men gave their lives for the life of the Nation, the sacrifice shall not be forgotten because the danger which demanded it was by it averted.

Into the wide chasm which opened throughout our land, threatening to destroy the State unless into the yawning depths was cast the choicest treasure of the Nation, there leaped four hundred thousand men—themselves the most precious possession of the Republic. The bloody chasm closed —God grant that it shall never reopen—but we shall richly deserve to stand again upon its awful brink if we forget them, our bravest and our best.

Rejoicing that our dead have not died in vain; believing it our duty, we esteem it our privilege, to commemorate their sacrifice; and we to-day by these simple ceremonies declare both the righteousness of the cause and the gratitude of the Nation.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 013 785 272 A